

Testimony to the Government Administration and Elections Committee

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Chairwoman Senator Flexer, Chairman Representative Fox, Vice-chairs Haskell and Thomas, Ranking Members Sampson and Cofrancesco and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Cheri Quickmire. I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, non-profit citizens' lobby that has worked to improve the way Connecticut's government operates since 1971. We have 1.5 million members nationwide and more than 15,000 members and activists in Connecticut. Common Cause in Connecticut has a long history of working to increase transparency in government and advocating for the removal of the corrosive influence of special interest money in government and politics and election reform.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify before the GAE committee on these important bills. We support the following proposals:

[S.B. No. 753 An Act Concerning the Counting of Incarcerated Persons for Purposes of Determining Legislative Districts](#)

[S.B. No. 1014 An Act Concerning a Municipal Election Monitor for the 2021 Municipal Election and the 2022 State Election](#)

[S.B. No. 1017 An Act Concerning Election Administration](#)

[H.B. No. 6575 An Act Concerning Risk-Limiting Audits for Election Results](#)

[H.B. No. 6578 An Act Concerning Participation in the Electoral Process](#)

**SB 753 AAC the Counting of Incarcerated Persons for Purposes of Determining Legislative Districts** is the most recent iteration of proposed legislation related to the shameful abuse of incarcerated bodies called "prison gerrymandering." It lets lawmakers inflate the population of districts and give places with prisons more representation. Politicians elected on these gerrymandered maps can ignore their incarcerated constituents, leaving people in prison with nobody to represent them or hear their concerns and it dilutes the potential impact of urban districts. **I have submitted separate testimony to address the urgency of making this long-delayed change before our next redistricting.** We urge passage.

**SB 1014 AAC a Municipal Election Monitor for the 2021 Municipal Election and the 2022 State Election.** This bill is very specific regarding the size of the municipality that will be impacted and the election years that are determined. It has

been requested at a municipal level in response to potential and actual improprieties in election management at a local level. Where Election Monitors have been appointed – Hartford and Bridgeport – we understand that management was greatly improved. Supervision/management by the office of the Secretary of the State is appropriate. **We urge passage.**

### **SB 1017 AAC Election Administration**

Making permanent the use of Absentee Drop Box Ballot boxes is the natural response to the overwhelming successful use we saw in the 2020 election. Thanks to the leadership of the Secretary of the State, they were used easily and widely in small towns and large municipalities by tens of thousands of voters. Local election officials took required security seriously and individuals were safe from unwanted contact with long voting lines and concerns for their health. We agree that this successful method of voting should be a permanent part of our system of election administration.

### **H.B. No. 6575 An Act Concerning Risk-Limiting Audits for Election Results**

Understanding that HB6575 proposes to establish a working group to examine the use of Risk-Limiting Audits for election results I will say that I agree that this is the direction we should be moving to ensure that our election results are as absolutely accurate as possible.

My colleague John Marion, Executive Director of Common Cause Rhode Island, will be testifying as to the success of RLA in Rhode Island in the last two elections. RI is only the second state in the nation to establish the system and recently released a report, “Risk-Limiting Audit Methods in the State of Rhode Island” with the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law and Verified Voting that documents and evaluates the effectiveness of three different RLA methods in order to choose the most effective system to ensure the integrity of their elections in 2020 and beyond.

From their report, “Election administration and security experts agree that RLAs are the “gold standard of post-election audits in an era when the integrity of our election systems face unprecedented domestic and international threats. These audits will provide an added layer of election protection to provide confidence that the reported winner is the actual winner”.

**We support passage of HB 6575.**

### **H.B. No. 6578 An Act Concerning Participation in the Electoral Process**

This is an extremely significant bill that is based on the assertion that all eligible citizens should be registered to vote by unless they decline. This will ensure that eligible citizens are automatically and electronically registered to vote unless they opt out. We urge passage of this bill with some updates – Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) should be available to eligible citizens when interacting with state agencies and programs in

addition to the Dept. of Motor Vehicles, including the Dept. of Social Services, HUSKY, Access Health CT, state colleges & universities and others.

Overall, this reform will save taxpayer money and make the election system even more efficient. AVR will enhance the security and integrity of our elections, eliminating outdated address and duplicative registrations through an automatic process, delivering accurate voter rolls to cities and towns. This improved data management will significantly reduce the strain for local election officials and possible confusion on election day. In addition, this bill codifies AVR as it exists today with the MOU with the DMV and the Secretary of the State's office making it secure for the future.

Automatic voter registration (AVR) has emerged as a promising 21st-century innovation by making voter registration an integral part of government services. AVR offers states an opportunity to create a modern, secure, efficient and accurate voter information system that promotes voter participation. The system is built on the crucial assertion that all eligible citizens should be registered to vote by default unless they decline. Nineteen states have versions of AVR.

Restoring the right to vote to people re-entering their communities on parole is also extremely important to us because disenfranchising people on parole sustains a racist system of inequality in our state. We, in Connecticut, have the most severe criminal disenfranchisement laws in the Northeast. We are the only state in the region that still prohibits those on parole from casting a ballot. Felony disenfranchisement laws became widespread in the United States after Civil War as a way for former Confederate states to circumvent Reconstruction amendments and stamp out Black political power. 20 states allow people on parole to vote and just weeks ago New York's state senate voted to restore voting rights to those on parole.

Preventing formerly incarcerated people from voting undermines good-faith attempts at integration, and artificially decreases the voting power of the communities in which people on parole reside.

**We urge you to pass HB 6578 with expansion of Automatic Voter Registration beyond the Department of Motor Vehicles to other state agencies.**